

Decisions for Completing GCSE, AS and A level Reform

March 2015 (updated November 2015)



Reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels taken by students in England are being introduced over the next three years (see Appendix A for a timeline of the changes). We are now announcing our decisions on the reform of qualifications for first teaching in September 2017.

Reforming GCSEs, AS and A levels for 2017

In July 2014, we consulted on proposals for how and when the current programme of reform should conclude.¹

We announced in December 2014² that any subject not reformed for first teaching in 2015 or 2016 must either be withdrawn from 2017 or be reformed for first teaching in 2017. This means that all GCSEs, AS and A levels in subjects that either have not been reformed for first teaching in 2015 and 2016, or that exam boards have not proposed for reform by 2017 will be withdrawn from 2017 onwards.

We have now made decisions on the other proposals that we consulted on, which we set out in this document. In particular we are confirming:

- that all reformed GCSE, AS and A levels in any given subject must be based on core content requirements;
- the principles for determining whether a subject could be made available as a reformed GCSE, AS or A level;
- the process for developing content requirements for subjects that are being reformed for 2017;

¹ www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/377804/2014-06-24-completing-gcse-as-and-a-level-reform.pdf

² www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcses-as-and-a-levels-new-subjects-to-be-taught-in-2015

- the list of subjects in which reformed content requirements will start to be developed to support new qualifications in 2017;
- when qualifications will be withdrawn, either because they are not being reformed or because they are being replaced by reformed qualifications
- a list of subjects that will not be offered as reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in 2017.

Core content requirements

As we proposed in our consultation, we have decided that all reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels must be based on core content requirements for the subject in which they are offered.

When we consulted on proposals for how subject content requirements could be developed, we did not expect that Government would be involved. The Department for Education (DfE) has since confirmed that it will continue to oversee the process for developing core content for subjects being reformed for 2017.

This means that while core content for each subject will still be developed by exam boards, the DfE will have overall responsibility for the process. This will include hosting public consultations on proposed core content and publishing the final agreed content requirements for each subject.

Determining if a subject can be reformed

We consulted on a proposed set of principles, which we could apply to existing and new subjects alike, to determine whether it would be appropriate to develop core content in any particular subject.

We proposed only to support the development of reformed GCSE, AS and A levels in subjects that:

1. are consistent with the primary purpose of a GCSE, AS or A level as defined in our General Conditions of Recognition;
2. are capable of securing a comparable level of demand³ to other reformed subjects;
3. can secure valid assessment, including reliability and manageability;
4. can be assessed in a way that differentiates reliably across the full grade range;

³ Level of demand is defined in our *General Conditions of Recognition* as “The degree of challenge that an assessment presents for the Learner.” www.gov.uk/government/publications/general-conditions-of-recognition

5. are based on content that is sufficiently distinct from other reformed subjects.

See Appendix B for a more detailed explanation of what each of these five principles means in practice.

Review of proposed subjects against our principles

We have applied our principles to determine those subjects in which core content should be developed. To do this we invited exam boards to submit proposals to us for the subjects they wanted to reform for teaching from 2017. We asked exam boards to ensure that each proposal provided evidence against all five of the principles outlined above.

We did not ask exam boards to submit proposals for the modern foreign languages in which they intend to offer reformed qualifications as part of this process. This was because the DfE had already published subject content requirements for reformed GCSE, AS and A levels in modern foreign languages. Exam boards are developing specifications for French, German and Spanish for first teaching in September 2016. It is now for exam boards to decide whether or not to develop reformed qualifications for other languages that meet these requirements, for first teaching in 2017.

The table below lists all of the subjects for which the exam boards submitted proposals.

List of subjects proposed by exam boards for reform in 2017	
GCSE subjects	AS and A Level subjects
Ancient history	Accounting
Astronomy	Ancient history
Business	Archaeology
Classical civilisation	Classical civilisation
Economics	Creative writing
Electronics	Critical thinking (AS only)
Engineering	Electronics
Environmental and land-based science	Environmental science
Film studies	Film studies
Geology	General studies
Health and social care	Geology
Home economics – child development	Government and politics
Information and communications technology	Health and social care
Media studies	History of art
Psychology	Information and communication technology (ICT)
Sociology	International development

Statistics	Law
	Media studies
	Music technology
	Philosophy
	Quantitative methods
	Statistics

We have reviewed the evidence provided in each of these proposals against our principles. For each subject, we considered whether or not the exam boards' proposal gave us confidence that they will be able to develop core content that meets our principles.

Where we have confidence that content could be developed in a proposed subject to meet our principles, the next stage is for exam boards to begin the process of developing core content requirements, overseen by the DfE. It is important to be clear that although a subject may be progressing to the next stage, there is no certainty that it will prove possible to develop content that meets our principles.

Before the proposed content and assessment requirements for a subject can be finalised, we will need to be satisfied that our principles have been met in full. This means there is still the possibility that some of the subjects being taken forward at this stage may not be reformed for 2017.

For the proposed subjects where we did not have confidence that content could be developed to meet our principles, we asked the exam boards for additional evidence to support their proposals. If, having considered this additional evidence, we are still not confident that content can be developed that meets our principles, the subject will not be reformed in time for first teaching in 2017.

Subjects for which reformed content requirements will start to be developed

For the subjects listed below, we have sufficient confidence at this stage that content requirements could be developed to meet our principles.

Until the subject content requirements are drafted by exam boards for each subject, it will not be possible to say for certain whether our principles have been met in full. At this stage there is still a possibility that some of the subjects listed below may not ultimately be reformed for 2017.

List of proposed subjects for reform in 2017 in which we consider content requirements could be developed to meet our principles	
GCSE subjects	AS and A level subjects
Ancient history	Accounting
Astronomy	Ancient history
Business	Archaeology
Classical civilisation	Classical civilisation
Economics	Critical thinking (AS only) [⌘]
Electronics	Electronics
Engineering	Environmental science
Film studies	Film studies
Information and communications technology [⌘]	General studies [⌘]
Media studies	Geology
Psychology	Government and politics
Sociology	History of art
Statistics	Information and communications technology [⌘]
	Law
	Media studies
	Philosophy
	Quantitative methods [⌘]
	Statistics

[⌘] Since this document was first published, content development for this subject has ceased. We updated this document in November 2015 to include this new information.

Proposed subjects still under review

For the subjects we list below, we do not at this stage have confidence that content can be developed that will meet our principles. We have invited exam boards to submit additional evidence to support their proposals for these subjects. Once we have reviewed that evidence, we will confirm whether we have sufficient confidence in these proposals for subject development to proceed.

List of proposed subjects for reform in 2017 that are still under review	
GCSE subjects	AS and A level subjects
Environmental and land-based science ^α	Creative writing ^α
Geology	Health and social care ^α
Health and social care ^α	International Development ^α
Home economics – child development ^α	Music technology

^α Since this document was first published, content development for this subject has ceased. We updated this document in November 2015 to include this new information

Subjects that will not be reformed in 2017

GCSEs, AS and A levels in subjects that have either not been reformed for first teaching in 2015 and 2016, or that exam boards have not proposed for reform by 2017 will be withdrawn from 2017 onwards.

Exam boards have not put forward proposals to develop reformed content requirements for the subjects listed in the table below. This means that qualifications in these subjects will not be available for teaching from September 2017 onwards. Unreformed qualifications in some of the subjects listed below will be withdrawn sooner than 2017 because they are being replaced by reformed qualifications that will be introduced in 2015 or 2016.

List of subjects that will not be reformed for first teaching in 2017	
GCSE subjects	AS and A level subjects
Additional science	Anthropology
Additional applied science	Applied art and design
Applied business	Applied business
Business and communication systems	Applied information and communication technology
Business studies and economics	Applied science
Catering	Citizenship studies
Digital communications	Communication and culture
Environmental science	Economics and business

Expressive arts	Home economics (Food, nutrition and health)
Further additional science	Human biology
Home economics – food and nutrition	Humanities
Home economics - textiles	Leisure studies
Hospitality	Media: communication and production
Hospitality and catering	Performance Studies
Human health and physiology	Performing Arts
Humanities	Pure mathematics
Law	Science in society
Leisure and tourism	Travel and tourism
Manufacturing	Use of mathematics (AS)
Performing arts	
Science	

Withdrawing unreformed qualifications in 2017

We have decided that existing or 'legacy' GCSE, AS and A levels offered in subjects that are not being reformed for 2017 will be withdrawn from September 2017. This means that unreformed qualifications will be assessed for the last time in summer 2018. The last cohort of students taking these qualifications will begin their studies in September 2016.

For subjects in which reformed qualifications are being developed, the legacy version will be withdrawn when the new, replacement version of the qualification is introduced. For example, the existing GCSE psychology qualifications would be replaced directly by reformed GCSE psychology.

In subjects being reformed for 2017, legacy qualifications will be withdrawn at the same time as qualifications in those subjects that are not being reformed. So again, this means that the last cohort of students taking these qualifications will begin their studies in September 2016.⁴

The last exam date for these legacy qualifications will be 2018 for students taking GCSEs and A levels, and 2017 for students taking legacy AS qualifications.

Withdrawing unreformed qualifications in 2016

Once a new qualification is introduced, the existing, or 'legacy' version will no longer be available. New GCSEs, AS and A levels are being introduced for a number of subjects for first teaching in 2016. Legacy qualifications currently offered in these subjects will be replaced by new qualifications based on updated content

⁴ We are currently considering the rules about re-sits for subjects being withdrawn, we will consult on these later this year.

requirements.⁵ The last cohort taking one of these legacy qualifications will begin their studies this September (2015).

We have also decided that when reformed qualifications are introduced in these subjects in 2016, a small number of unreformed qualifications will also be withdrawn, in addition to those being directly replaced. These are listed in the table below.

List of subjects to be withdrawn in 2016	
GCSE subjects	AS and A level subjects
Additional science	Performance studies
Additional applied science	Performing arts
Catering	
Computing	
Design and technology (Food technology route only, other routes remain)	
Expressive arts	
Further additional science	
Home economics (Food and nutrition route only, other routes remain)	
Hospitality and catering	
Human health and physiology	
Hospitality and catering	
Humanities	
Performing arts	
Science	

We have decided that unreformed qualifications in these subjects should be withdrawn because they are too similar to one or more of the subjects being reformed for first teaching in 2016. Their content overlaps with them too much, even if the emphasis may be different in places. If these legacy qualifications were to co-exist with the reformed ones, the differences between them in assessment structure, coupled with their equal acceptability to users, would be very likely to affect entries for the reformed qualifications. This would make it difficult for us to maintain standards and would be unfair to students.

⁵ In some cases, reformed qualifications will directly replace legacy qualifications which have a different name. For example, reformed AS and A levels in ancient Greek will replace legacy AS and A levels in 'Classics: ancient Greek'.

Appendix A - Timelines for the programme of GCSE, AS and A level reform

Timeline of GCSE reforms				
Specification available to schools	New GCSE taught from	First exams	Subjects	Notes
Autumn 2014	September 2015	Summer 2017	English language English literature Mathematics	
Autumn 2015	September 2016	Summer 2018	Ancient languages (classical Greek and Latin) Art and design Biology Chemistry Citizenship studies Combined science Computer science Dance Drama Food preparation and nutrition Geography History Modern foreign languages (French, German and Spanish) Music Physical education Physics Religious studies	

Spring 2016	September 2017	Summer 2019	Design and technology	This subject has been put back for first teaching in 2017.
Autumn 2016	September 2017	Summer 2019	Ancient history Astronomy Business Classical civilisation Economics Electronics Engineering Film studies Information and communications technology [⌘] Media studies Psychology Sociology Statistics	Reformed qualifications will only be available in these subjects if the content requirements for them meet Ofqual's principles for reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels. This list does not include any reformed language qualifications that exam boards may choose to develop for first teaching in 2017.

[⌘] Since this document was first published, content development for this subject has ceased and it will not now be reformed. We updated this document in November 2015 to include this new information.

Timeline of AS and A level reforms				
Specification available to schools	New AS/A level taught from:	First exams:	Subjects*	Notes
Autumn 2014	September 2015	AS Summer 2016 A level Summer 2017	Art and design Biology Business Chemistry Computer science Economics English language English language and literature English literature History Physics Psychology Sociology	
Autumn 2015	September 2016	AS Summer 2017 A level Summer 2018	Ancient languages (classical Greek and Latin) Dance Drama and theatre Geography Modern foreign languages (French, German and Spanish) Music Physical education Religious studies	

Spring 2016	September 2017	AS Summer 2018 A level Summer 2019	Design and technology Further mathematics Mathematics	This subject has been put back for first teaching in 2017.
Autumn 2016	September 2017	AS Summer 2018 A level Summer 2019	Accounting Ancient history Archaeology Classical civilisation Critical thinking (AS only)⌘ Electronics Environmental science Film studies General studies⌘ Geology Government and politics History of art Information and communications technology⌘ Law Media studies Philosophy Quantitative methods⌘ Statistics	Reformed qualifications will only be available in these subjects if the content requirements for them meet Ofqual's principles for reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels. This list does not include any reformed language qualifications that exam boards may choose to develop for first teaching in 2017.

*All subjects are applicable to both AS and A level unless indicated otherwise

⌘ Since this document was first published, content development for this subject has ceased, and it will not now be reformed. We updated this document in November 2015 to include this new information.

Appendix B – an explanation of our principles for reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications

Purpose

A subject offered as a reformed GCSE, AS or A level must meet the primary purpose of that qualification. We have defined the primary purposes of GCSEs, AS and A levels in the conditions⁶ that apply to all qualifications carrying these titles.

Level of demand

A subject must be set, as far as possible, at the same level of demand as other subjects within the same qualification type. This is important for maintaining standards, enabling the qualifications to meet their defined purposes and to maintain public confidence.

Validity

Subject content should be able to act as a foundation for qualifications that will produce valid and reliable results, and assessments for that subject content must be manageable across large cohorts of students. We expect assessment to be mainly by exam. Non-exam assessment should only be included when it is the only valid way to assess essential elements of the subject.

Differentiating student performance

The content in each subject must support effective assessment of students against the full grade range for the type of qualification. New GCSE qualifications will be graded using the numbers 1 to 9, with 9 being the highest grade. A levels will continue to be graded from A* to E, and AS qualifications from A to E

Separation of subjects

Reformed GCSE, AS or A level qualifications can only be offered in a subject that has content, aims, and stakeholder expectations that are sufficiently distinct from other reformed subjects within the same qualification type. The content requirements should be specific to and appropriate for that particular subject. The more GCSEs or A levels there are that cover the same or similar content, the harder it is to secure validity and comparability in those qualifications. Having too many similar qualifications in subjects that overlap considerably also risks undermining public confidence and causing confusion for users of those qualifications.

⁶ *GCE Qualification Level Conditions and Requirements*, available at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements

GCSE (9 to 1) Qualification Level Conditions and Requirements, available at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-qualification-level-conditions